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# The Relationship between Complaints, Emotion, Anger, and Subsequent Behavior of Customers

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Abstract: The quality of a company's long term relationship with its customers is chiefly dependent on such company's long term viability. Organizations today are faced with the task of not only attracting new customers, but also the problems of keeping the existing ones. In other to attain and retain a pool of devoted and profitable customers, companies seek to provide an unblemished high quality products and service to their customers (Kotler and Armstrong, 2006). Nonetheless, as hard as they try, even the best companies cannot totally eradicate problems (Gursoy, Ekiz, and Chi, 2007); as most companies only hear few of these problems through consumer complaints (Hedrick, Beverland, and Minahan, 2007); therefore, one major factor that distinguishes between successful companies from the non successful ones is how they view and handle these complaints (Zemke and Anderson, 2007).

This paper is to enable consumer scientists, consumer consultants, consumer behaviour researchers and those with the responsibility of handling consumer complaints to explore and understand consumer complaint behaviour in its entirety. Consumer anger can result in behaviors that cost organizations money and damage the consumer-to-firm (C2F) relationship (Huefner and Hunt, 2000), as consumers will experience certain emotions, as such emotion is characterized by specific evaluations of situations. These emotions then influence how consumers will respond to the situation; whether an emotion is positive or negative depends on the emotion specificity approach focuses on the specific nature of emotions of equivalent valence (Rucker and Petty, 2004).

Keywords: Consumer complaints, Emotions, Service failures, Consumers Anger, Emotional dissonance.

#### I. Introduction:

While it has been proved that not all initial marketplace interactions are successful, especially when customer expectations are not met, resulting in dissatisfaction when such customer encounters product or service failures; which may in turn lead to complaints and redress-seeking behaviour. As a result, complaint can be viewed as an indicator of conflict between the customer and the firm (Homburg and Furst, 2005; Tax, Brown and Chandrashekaran, 1998). According to Weiss, Suckow and Cropanzano (1999) conflict is an unavoidable fact in all phases of development of human relationship and, sometimes may not, represent negative phenomenon since 'it is how such conflict is resolved or managed that will affect the quality of such relationships' (Ting-Toomey, 1994). Nevertheless, effective resolutions of problems encountered by customers have been linked closely to their forming a relationship that will lead to mutual interest, trust commitment, and customer satisfaction (Tax, Brown and Chandrashekaran, 1998).

Ability to establishing good relationships by business organizations with their customers has been proofed to be beneficial to organizations (Gronroos, 1990; Berry, 1983; Gwinner, Gremler, and Bitner, 1998) and consumers (Gwinner *et al.*, 1998; Bendapudi and Berry, 1997). For example, positive relationships have the ability to make up for lapses in organizational performance (Hess, Shankar, and Klien, 2003; Priluck, 2003; and Berry, 1995). According to Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekaran (1998), through long-term relationships organizations build up goodwill and loyalty with consumers and as a result one instance of poor organizational performance will not erase all the goodwill consumers possess. However, negative experiences are not totally erased by prior positive experiences and these negative experiences can have a strong effect on future patronage decisions (Tax *et al.*, 1998). Consumer behaviour researchers agree that prior to purchasing and consuming products, consumers form expectations regarding the performance of such products in a particular use situation.

Whenever, the expectations of consumers are not met in terms of product/service satisfaction, will always lead to disappointment on the part of the consumers; as a result post-purchase behavior intention of consumers, must be a major concern to businesses, such that consequence actions will not have negative effects on the organization. However, ability to effectively address any negative post-purchase experience for the improvement of customer satisfaction when a problem or mistake takes place will benefit the organization; but when such dissatisfaction is not addressed, it leads to mistrust on the part of the consumer to the organization, but if the problem or mistake is addressed to the satisfaction of the consumers, it may bring an opportunity to

establish a long-term relationship with customers; as trust, commitment and customer satisfaction were also the major topics of some researchers (Geyskens et al., 1999; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). In fact, among behavioral scientists, there was a consensus that market behavior of individuals is closely related to their social class.

#### **II.** Literature Review:

According to Singh and Howell (1985), consumer complaint behavior is "...a set of all behavioral and non-behavioral responses which involve communicating something negative regarding a purchase episode and is triggered by perceived dissatisfaction with that episode". Consumers will not only complain to service providers, but also to family members and friends. Some dissatisfied customer will even further complain to a consumer council or write a letter of complaint to management (Heung and Lam, 2003). According to Singh (1989) consumer complaint behaviours could be classified into three possible categories: voice responses, private responses, and third-party responses.

Complaints from customers should be regarded as gifts for the following reasons: (i). company retains the opportunity to remedy the problem and hold on to the customer, if dissatisfied customers complain. (ii). Complaints may prevent not only the loss the current business but also the future businesses from that particular customer (Hirschman (1970). (iii). the company's reputation can be harmed by negative word-of-mouth (WOM) actions taken by dissatisfied customers, resulting in the loss of current and potential customers (Iyiola, 2013). (iv). if a customer leaves the company without complaining, then company is deprived of valuable feedback about the quality of its product or service (Fornell and Wernerfelt, 1988), also hindering its capability to identify problems that may, and most probably will, affect other customers.

#### Product/Service failure and complaint:

The study of product/service failure has been documented by both researchers (e.g. Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekaran, 1998) and practitioners (e.g. Boston Consulting Group, 2001; McKinsey & Company, 2001). Both researchers and practitioners have acknowledged that and recovery efforts on the part on consumers encounter significant implications as satisfaction, trust, and commitment have been threatened. It is therefore, not surprisingly that researchers have systematically examined why and how consumers respond to service failures. Consumer complaint behaviour dates back over 30 years and, responses to customer dissatisfaction have received a substantial share of research attention (Crie, 2003).

Emotional responses to product/service failures by consumers are entirely based on a dissatisfactory experience and can therefore only be negative; while service recovery encounters on the other hand, include all actions taken by a service provider in order to try to resolve the problem a customer has with the organization (Gronroos, 1990). As a result, customers have the potential to display negative and positive emotions because each of the various attributes of the recovery (resolution speed, politeness, refund etc.) is a potential source of pleasure or frustration (Schoefer and Ennew, 2005).

Recently, consumers have become more and more vocal with companies activities not only by providing good wishes and suggestions, but also more often by voicing their dissatisfactions by complaining. Consumer complaining is on the rise, according to Better Business Bureau (BBB) (2011) report indicating that complaining was up 10% nationwide over the previous year other sources report that complaining across retail categories bas increased any where from 5% to 100% in the past years (CBC News 2011). This growth in consumer voice has been fuelled by technology (for example: online feedback forms, pop-up web surveys, social media platforms; like Facebook and Twitter) that provides an easy and convenient outlet for consumer opinion. Indeed, the advent of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter has changed the psychology of consumer complaining (Winch 2011).

According to Colgate and Norris (2001) normally service failure is defined as *a problem, mistake, or error that occurs in the delivery of a service*. Service failures can occur at any time during the customer's relationship with a service provider (Kelley & Davis, 1994).

Customer satisfaction affects a firm's performance levels under reasonable assumptions of firm and consumer behavior, as a result firms will be able to build sustainable competitive advantages and hence obtain superior firm performance (Iyiola, 2013); however, when consumers are not satisfied, either with the products or services purchased, complaints will emerge. Ability on the part of producers/service providers to therefore, effectively handle customers' complaints is one of the crucial business strategies to develop and maintain relationships between the company and its current customers (Tax and Brown, 1998). Customer complaints are also often considered as a response to product failure which causes dissatisfaction with the customers, and if the problem is not handled properly to the satisfaction of the customer, may drives customer switching behavior (Ross, 1999).

### Product Liability and crisis management:

The growth of consumer demand for product safety and the tightening of product liability (PL) law make PL a critical issue in marketing today, as most PL problems are due to manufacturing defects. Defects and damages are uniformly distributed over various types of products. The Manufacturers liability as a result of harms caused by products to their customers is of great. In advanced nations, thousands of product liability cases are filed annually not only in state but also in federal courts, to include some class actions that involve hundreds of thousands or even millions of individuals as plaintiffs. The legal bases for product liability suits are expansive, comprising liability for manufacturing defect, design defect, and failure to warn. It is important to note that product liability cases receive noteworthy attention from the media, especially when they concern widely sold products that harm many consumers; additionally, product liability is of growing importance particularly in the European Union, Asia, and African nations.

Organizations that experienced product harm area usually faced with the problem of controlling the resulting crisis; through crisis management. A crisis is an event developed through complex processes, which causes extended damages and potentially affects an entire organisation (Shrivastava, Mitroff, Miller, and Miglani, 1988), as many definitions accept that a crisis may even threaten the survival of a company (Reilly, 1993). Crises are often difficult to anticipate and, practically, to prevent. Crises if not well managed can lead to decrease in sales, low market shares, and widespread negative publicity(Griffin, Babin, and Attaway, 1991; Weinberger, Romeo, and Piracha, 1991), in view of this, many researchers emphasise on pre-crisis management practices, such as risk analysis, efficient training of crisis management units.

## Customers' Emotion, Complaints, and Anger: Emotion:

Emotions are strong, relatively uncontrollable feelings that occur when environmental events or our mental processes trigger physiological changes, such as increased heart rate; thereby, affect our behavior (Iyiola and Iyiola, 2011). Emotion, according to Izard (1993) is a complex matter however, it stresses the incident of pain, anger, and joy which is central and manifests itself as an action tendency, a biasing of perceptions, or a feeling state. He further maintains that emotional experiences are activated by neural, sensory motor, motivational, and cognitive systems, nevertheless he also notes that neural systems can activate emotions without cognitive mediation. Emotions are generally of short duration and are associated with a specific stimulus; mood, in contrast, is more enduring, more diffuse, and less related to specific stimuli (Frijda, 1993).

Emotions also have a stronger connection with specific behaviors than moods do. Emotion is defined as mental state of mind that emerges from the cognitive appraisals of event during individual interactions with the surroundings. It is argued to originate in reaction to an assessment, an evaluative judgment, of something of significance to one's welfare (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Tax et al., 1998). Individual 'emotions' are identified as a key contributor to displayed human behavior which represents the strength of the person's relationship with the environment. van Dolen et al., (2004) argued that customer emotions are extensively influenced by employee behavior. According to Baumeister and Vohs (2007) decision-making across different fields of study such as psychology, marketing, and economics have witnessed a promising interest in the role of emotions in several decades. Studies on emotions have investigated structural aspects of emotional experience of consumption and its ability to predict satisfaction (Dube and Morgan, 1996). Studies imply that customer satisfaction, loyalty, and future behavioral intentions are influenced by customer's emotions during service encounter (Barsky and Nash, 2002; Oliver et al., 1997).

#### Complaints:

Complaining is "an expression of dissatisfaction, whether subjectively experienced or not, for the purpose of venting emotions or achieving intra psychic goals, interpersonal goals, or both" (Kowalski, 1996). When there is a failure in the provision of service or the expectation(s) of the consumer is/are not met, then complaint will follow. Empirical studies have shown that customer dissatisfaction or satisfaction is related to customer complaining behavior (Bearden and Teel 1983; Oliver 1980). Customer complaining behavior (CCB) is "a multiple set of both behavioral and non-behavioral responses triggered by a dissatisfactory purchase episode" (Singh, 1988). In reality, customers who expressed their dissatisfaction were communicating with the firms, which could be regarded as a chance to improve company's work; as a result, customers' complaints should be appreciated and be taken as feedbacks from customers. Complaints could be triggered by (i). customer dissatisfied feeling and emotion (ii). behavioral responses and non-behavioral ones, and (iii). customer complaint behaviors are not antagonistic but mutually, and may occur simultaneously.

According to Bennett (1997) complaints can be divided into several major categories, mainly as an expressions of attitude or feeling about the recipient specific complaints about behavior allegations that others were failing to meet their obligations or were falling below the complainant's expectations and accusations that barriers were being erected against the attainment of individual goals.

The psychological study of consumer behaviour has recognized the importance of affect in consumption in the last three decades and consumer researchers have been exploring the influence of and the interdependence between emotions and many essential aspects of consumption such as persuasion, preference, evaluation, environment, and behavioural intentions (Simonson, Carmon, Dhar, Drolet, and Nowlis, 2001). Whenever consumers complained, they expect that the organization should positively attend to them, however, most customers who are dissatisfied with the outcomes they received believe that there is a problem of inequity and this could result in dissatisfaction if a provider does not identify the cost in time and effort that customer spends to seek compensation for the inequity (McCollough et al., 2000). Most distributions and outcomes for compensation can take the form of corrections of charges, refunds, repairs, credit, replacements, and apologies (Kelley et al., 1993). While it generally accepted that individual emotions act as influential psychological dimension directing people though and eventually decision making process, Huefner and Hunt (2000) concluded that consumer's experience of anger can result in behaviors that cost firms money and damage the consumer-to-firm relationship.

#### Anger

The last phase of the consumer decision making process is the post-purchase behaviour, at this phase the customer will either be satisfied or dissatisfied; thus this state of being satisfied or dissatisfied influences the customers' post purchase actions (Kotler, 2003). After evaluating the product or service if the customer's expectations are not met, such consumer is dissatisfied and can lead to anger. Dissatisfaction and anger are two expected responses a customer may exhibit and both are different emotions. Bougie, Pieters, and Zeelenberg (2003) clearly state that, both emotional states "i.e. anger and dissatisfaction differ widely on the five experiential contents that are feelings, thoughts, action tendencies, motivational goals, and actions."

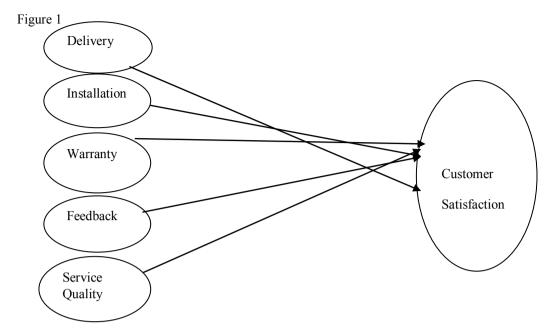
While emotion theorists disagree on whether anger is the prime human emotion (Izard, 1991) or is distinguished from a widespread state of distress (Camras, 1992), they do agree that anger serves an array of adaptive functions. Scholars agree that "anger organizes and regulates physiological and psychological processes related to self-defense and mastery and regulates social and interpersonal behaviours" (Izard and Kobak, 1991; Saarni, Campos, Camras, and Witherington, 2006). Emotion from a functionalist viewpoint is demonstrated or exhibited when there is an obstacle to goal attainment; thus, anger's function is to overcome such obstacles in order to achieve goals (Saarni et al., 2006).

Consumer anger is defined as an emotional state which stems from a consumer's perceived loss of entitlement due to an unfair, threatening or harmful consumption experience. The consumer experience of anger can result in behaviors that cost firms money and damage the consumer-to-firm relationship (Huefner and Hunt, 2000). Therefore, understanding this behavior is in the best interest of firms. Anger is frequently experienced as a result emotion and social transgressions that leads to a strong driver of consumer behavior. While anger is different from emotion, it is also thought to be caused by an inability of consumers to get their desired goals. While generally accepted, these assertions offer little insight into how anger evoking incidences can be controlled or prevented. Customer anger according to Bougie, Pieters, and Zeelenberg (2003) has been linked to dissatisfaction.

#### **III.** Customer Service Relationship (CSR):

"Making and retaining valuable relationship with customer while using every aspect of taking, retaining and enhancing customer is known as customer relationship management" (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). Service quality has been increasingly recognized as a vital factor in the success of any business; as scholars have agree that service quality can be grouped into two major categories (Gronroos, 1984; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry,1985). The first is referred to as "outcome quality" (Zeithaml et. al., 1985) and the second as "technical" quality (Gronroos, 1984). The resulting quality is associated with the mode of service delivery, while the technical quality addresses how the service was actually delivered – i.e. the procedures the customer went through to get the service.

In today's business world, customer satisfaction is viewed as a very important factor in the success of an organization; it shows how firms are dedicated to offer quality product or services to their customers that ultimately increase customer loyalty. Satisfying the customer is one of the basic objectives of the organization. Total evaluation of customer satisfaction starts from the moment the customer steps into the store to purchase a product or service; thereafter, organizations may have to provide after sale services to retain and satisfy its customer. Some of the services that may be provided are: delivery, installation, warranty, feedback, and service quality. In each of these, customer will evaluate the firm's performance. A positive evaluation shows that the customer is satisfied, while a negative evaluation indicates a dissatisfied customer. In view of this a proposed model is shown below.



Source: Proposed Model

Organizations can achieve their objective of satisfying and retaining customers through CSR. A sale of products/services by organization to customers does not terminate the relationship between the two; as a matter of fact it is the beginning of the relationship; as after sale service issues must be addressed; therefore, when organization sell product it has to make adequate planning for services after sale. Handling after sale service program well usually leaves a lasting impression in the mind of the consumers as they are satisfied. Customer satisfaction leads to increased in demand of more product/service of the organization; therefore, after sale service is important for organization to compete in the market (Vitasek, 2005).

The difference involving service quality and satisfaction has generated a great deal of discussion and disagreement. According to the service quality school view satisfaction as a forerunner of service quality in which the numbers of individual transactions "decay" into an overall attitude towards service quality (Dash and Mahaptra, 2010). However, the satisfaction school holds the opposite view that assessment of service quality lead to an overall attitude towards the service that they call satisfaction. This shows a strong link between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, as customer's perception of service and quality of product will determine the success of the product or service in the market. It can be argued that if the service quality exceeds the expectations of customers then satisfaction will be high; on the contrary, if service quality falls short of customer expectations, the level of customer satisfaction will be low (Choudhary, Akhter, Asif, Choudhry, Siddique, and Mughal, 2011). Thus, good service quality will help to predict customer's judgement, as "low" quality will indicate performance does not meet their expectations and quality as "high" when performance exceed expectations.

#### The Final 'Deadly Blow':

Consumers tend to lean towards recovery of what they considered a product/service failure from the other party - (the product/service provider). Ability to handle the situation to the satisfaction of the consumer will go a long way on the next line of action the consumer will take. The firm has many options at her disposal to turn the negative situation to positive such as: exchange of goods, refunds, discount or even a simple apology will turn the situation around. When things go wrong negative emotions, such as frustration, anger, and even rage, are produced and expressed; therefore, when the service fails, recovery attempts by service providers may enhance or enflame these negative emotions. Ability to handle 'angry' customers following a service failure is a vital aspect of a service provider's work role as an improper response may only make the situation worse (Sparks and McColl-Kennedy, 2001).

When fundamental expectations of a trust are dishonoured then betrayal may be experienced (Elavgovan and Shapirio 1998). Recovery had a significant positive impact on emotions, feelings of justice, satisfaction and behavioural intentions for both service failure and betrayal. However, significant differences between failure and betrayal remain even following a full recovery attempt. Betrayed consumers should react to the retailer by engaging in voice, exit, and negative word-of-mouth behaviours (Richins, 1983). Customers who contact a service company to voice a complaint are more likely to exit. Customers exit behaviour varies depending on the nature of the complaint. When a disruption in core service is the source of the complaint,

customers become dissatisfied and more likely to cancel. Customer expectations of ancillary services seem to be viewed less critically. Maute and Dube (1999) found that there are indeed discernible patterns of emotional experience associated with a service failure and that these patterns are related to the behavioural consequences of dissatisfaction (i.e. voice, brand switching, negative word-of-mouth, disloyalty, and exit).

#### **Conclusion/Recommendations:** IV.

Kalamas et al., (2008) in their study examined the outcome of anger on consumer evaluations and post purchase behaviors. They discovered that as the intensity of the anger state increased, consumers were more likely to intentionally levy consequences. As a matter of fact, angry consumers were more likely to complain and engaged a third-party action (such as Better Business Bureau). Angry customers can also engage in a negative word of mouth (NGWOM), by telling their friends and family members. They can also use the social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Yahoo Messenger, Facetime etc., to spread the 'news'.

Funches (2011) in her study concluded that consumers that experiences anger are likely to lead to damaging consumer-firm relationships. These strain relationship are costly in terms of both time and money invested by both parties to build the relationship. Neither the firm nor the consumer will realize the full potential of its investments. The firm will not realize the full consumer lifetime value and the consumer will not experience the full benefits and convenience of the relationship.

Service professionals must concern themselves not only with excellent provision of the tangible and/or more relational aspects of the service environment, but must also consider consumer mood state and/or the effect of the service environment/exchange upon this mood state, satisfaction and behaviour longer term. Organisations should extend their ongoing training and development to include some discussion of the role of consumer emotion. Employees' selection and training should be expanded so that employees can recognise customers' emotional states and respond accordingly.

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